

CLAIMS:

1. A vending machine operable to accept payments in units of different denominations, to perform vends, and to dispense change corresponding to the difference between payments and vend prices, the machine also being operable, in response to determining that insufficient change is available, either (i) to dispense a lesser amount of change or (ii) to inhibit a requested vend, depending on whether the difference between the available change and the correct change is equal to or less than a predetermined allowable overpay amount, wherein the machine has means permitting alteration of a stored parameter defining the predetermined allowable overpay amount.
2. A vending machine as claimed in claim 1, which is operable to provide a warning indication prior to initiation of a transaction if the available change meets a predetermined criterion.
3. A vending machine as claimed in claim 2, wherein the warning indication is provided only if the allowable overpay amount is non-zero.
4. A vending machine as claimed in claim 2 or claim 3, wherein said predetermined criterion is met when the available change is less than the value of the lowest denomination non-refundable payment unit.

5. A vending machine as claimed in any preceding claim, which is operable to provide an "exact change" indication to a customer when a requested vend is inhibited.
- 5 6. A vending machine as claimed in claim 5, wherein the machine is operable, when inhibiting a vend, to permit the customer to request a vend at a different price.
7. A vending machine as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the
10 vending machine is operable to reject a non-refundable payment unit in response to determining that accepting the unit would result in the difference between a credit value and the amount of refundable change exceeding said predetermined allowable overpay amount.
- 15 8. A vending machine having display means arranged to give first and second indications that insufficient change may be available to a customer making a purchase, the first indication being given as a warning prior to a transaction being initiated, and the second indication being given after a transaction has been initiated, each indication being produced in response to
20 the detection of a respective set of conditions.

9. A vending machine as claimed in claim 8, which is operable to accept monetary units in a plurality of denominations, and to dispense change in at least one of said denominations but not in at least one further denomination, wherein a first indication is given when the amount of available change in the machine is less than the value of the highest-value further denomination monetary unit.

10. A vending machine as claimed in claim 8 or 9, wherein a second indication is given after a product is selected for vending in dependence on a comparison of the money available for change and the price of the selected vend item.

11. A vending machine as claimed in claim 10, wherein the circumstances giving rise to the second indication also cause inhibition of the selected vend, the machine then being operable to permit selection of a different vend.

12. A vending machine as claimed in any one of claims 8 to 11, wherein a second indication is given after a monetary unit is deposited in dependence on parameters including the money available for change and the value of the deposited monetary unit.

13. A vending machine as claimed in claim 12, wherein the circumstances giving rise to the second indication also cause the deposited monetary unit to be refunded.

5 14. A vending machine as claimed in any one of claims 8 to 13, which is operable to prevent vending of a product when the deposited money minus the available change exceeds the product price by more than a predetermined non-zero allowable overpay amount.

10 15. A vending machine as claimed in claim 14, including means enabling alteration of a stored parameter defining the predetermined allowable overpay amount.

15 16. A vending machine which is operable to accept payments in units of different denominations, to dispense change corresponding to the difference between a received payment and a vend price, and to store received payments either in a first store permitting subsequent dispensing therefrom by the machine as change or in a second store which does not permit such subsequent dispensing, depending upon the denomination of the payment unit,
20 wherein the machine has a display means and is operable to cause the display means to provide a first indication when the amount of available change is less than the value of the highest-denomination coin storable in the second

store, and a second indication when the amount of the received payment exceeds the available change by more than a predetermined allowable overpay amount.

- 5 17. A vending machine which is operable to accept payments in units of different denominations, to dispense change corresponding to the difference between a received payment and a vend price, and to store received payments either in a first store permitting subsequent dispensing therefrom by the machine as change or in a second store which does not permit such
10 subsequent dispensing, depending upon the denomination of the payment unit, wherein the machine has a display means and is operable to cause the display means to provide a first indication when the amount of available change is less than the value of the highest-denomination coin storable in the second store, and a second indication when the difference between a credit value and
15 a vend price exceeds the available change by more than a predetermined allowable overpay amount.

18. A vending machine as claimed in claim 16 or 17, wherein the second indication is provided for a predetermined interval.

19. A vending machine as claimed in claim 16, 17 or 18, including a common display means for displaying both the first indication and the second indication.

5 20. A vending machine which has a display means and which is operable, in response to selection of a product for vending, to compare the difference between the value of deposited money and the product price with the available change, and to inhibit the vend if that difference exceeds a predetermined allowable overpay amount, the machine being operable in these circumstances
10 also to cause the display means to provide an "insufficient change" indication and to allow selection of a product of different price.

21. A vending machine which is operable in response to the depositing of a non-refundable monetary unit to compare a credit value, including the value
15 of the monetary unit, with the value of money available for change and to prevent acceptance of the coin and provide an indication on a display means to a customer if the difference is greater than a predetermined allowable overpay amount.

20 22. A vending machine as claimed in any one of claims 16 to 21, wherein the predetermined allowable overpay amount is non-zero.

23. A vending machine as claimed in claim 22, including means for altering the predetermined allowable overpay amount.

24. A vending machine which is operable both to (i) prevent acceptance of
5 a received monetary unit in dependence on the availability of dispensable monetary units and (ii) prevent a vend operation in dependence on the availability of dispensable monetary units.

25. A vending machine which is operable to prevent acceptance of a
10 monetary unit in dependence of the availability of monetary units for dispensing as change, the vending machine having display means arranged to provide an indication to a customer in response to receipt of a monetary unit which is so prevented from being accepted.

15 26. A vending machine as claimed in claim 25, which is further operable to inhibit a vend operation in dependence on a vend price, a credit value corresponding to the value of one or more accepted monetary units and the availability of monetary units for dispensing as change.

20 27. A vending machine as claimed in claim 26, wherein the display means is arranged to provide an indication to a customer when a vend operation is inhibited.

28. A vending machine as claimed in claim 26 or 27, wherein the machine is arranged, when a vend has been inhibited, to allow a customer to select a vend at a different price.